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Residents don't like smell of cleanup plan

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GRIFFITH — Federal and state environmental officials tried to convince citizens Thursday that a new contamination-cleanup plan for a Griffith industrial site is better than the old one.

The new plan for the American Chemical Service land emphasizes containing most of the contamination there instead of removing it.

A cleanup plan approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1992 needs to be changed because it would be too expensive and hazardous, officials said.

"In my opinion, it is safer to implement the remedy we are proposing than the 1992 remedy," EPA project manager Kevin Adler said.

Some of the approximately 18 citizens at Thursday's hearing didn't buy that argument.

"All you're doing is postponing the inevitable," said Griffith resident George Smolka.

He said the contaminated soil

should be removed and destroyed, because chemicals that seeped into the ground for more than 30 years could eat away a containment barrier built around the site.

Others questioned how the plan would keep contamination from getting into the adjacent Griffith municipal landfill; whether the companies who contributed to the site's pollution — and now have to pay for its cleanup — pushed the EPA into adopting a less-expensive plan; and whether all the barrels of buried waste would be removed.

The 1992 plan was abandoned after the estimated cost soared to at least \$150 million. The current proposal would cost an estimated \$60 to \$70 million.

The EPA plans to get all of the cleanup costs from companies that brought waste to American Chemical Service from 1955 to 1990, when ACS ran a solvent recovery facility there.

So far, about 1,000 smaller companies have put \$25 million into a cleanup fund, and the EPA now is

negotiating with 35 to 40 larger companies to pay the rest of the cleanup cost and the estimated \$1 million annual cost of operating the ground-water cleanup system.

The current plan calls for covering the site with a layer of clay and asphalt, pumping out and treating the ground water and extracting vapors from the soil through wells.

Also, an estimated 400 to 2,500 barrels of waste buried at the site will be dug up, and about two acres of PCB-laden wetlands soil near the site will be dug up and taken to a hazardous waste landfill.

An underground barrier wall was built in 1997, to keep contamination within a 19-acre area. A ground water pumping and treatment system was installed.

While the previous plan's goal was to make the ground safe enough to build houses on in the future, the current plan aims at making the site acceptable for industrial use.

The EPA is accepting comments on the plan through Friday, May 21.